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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Liberation, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Conditions for Saharawis living with disabilities continue to get worse in the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara

Morocco is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability which was adopted in 2006 and ratified by Morocco in 2009.

Despite this, Saharawis with disabilities suffer doubly as a result of the Morrocan occupation of Western Sahara, not only through routine human rights violations against the Saharawi population, but also as a result of the severe restrictions placed on NGOs working with people with disabilities. This deprives Saharawis with disabilities of the opportunities to live a dignified life and exercise their political, economic and social rights.

The few organisations providing services to Saharawi people with disabilities depend entirely on donations from the Saharawi population, as they are not financed or supported in any other way by the Moroccan state. Reasons for this are entirely political, as the Moroccan state would never support organisations which are pro self-determination of the Saharawi people and all Saharawi-led organisations automatically fall into this category. Over the past year, unemployment and poverty rates among the Saharawi population have increased significantly which means that disability organisations are now forced to reduce their services or to close as their already weak supporter base is dwindling further.

Disabled people of Saharawi origin confirm not only have difficulty accessing medical and rehabilitation services but also rarely have access to education. As a result, they are unable to obtain paid employment, which is already difficult for Saharawis. In many cases, they are unable to lead a dignified life, forced into begging and poverty, relying on the help and goodwill of others. Disabled people are also often subject to rape and other abuse.

There is a notable gap between the experiences of Moroccan and Saharawi people with disabilities, due to the complete lack of will on the part of the Moroccan authorities to support people with disabilities of Saharawi origin, mirroring the wider divide between the two groups across society.

Adala UK has conducted several interviews with Saharawi people with disabilities as well representatives of disability organisations:

> **Sidi Mohamad Aluat**, President of the disability NGO 'Absar Al Khayr', based in El Aaiun, says '*The Moroccan authorities do not allow us to register our organisation and we do not receive any government support due to our political position with regards to the status of Western Sahara and our belief in the right to self-determination. When we demand our rights as people with disabilities, or join political demonstrations, these are always brutally suppressed by the Moroccan forces.*'
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> **Said Hadad**, a Saharawi man with a physical disability, stated that he had presented seven complaints of police violence to the Moroccan king's public prosecutor in El Aaiun but none of these had ever been investigated. His latest complaint was filed on 18th February 2015 under archive number 15/3126/17. Similarly, **Housine Nasiri**, another disabled man, told Adala UK that he had presented over ten official complaints of physical and mental force used against him to judges in El Aaiun which were also not investigated. His latest complaint was filed on 18th February 2015 under archive number 15/3126/16.

During 2015, the Moroccan authorities forcefully broke up peaceful protests by people with disabilities in Western Sahara, acting indiscriminately for instance against people in wheelchairs, under the pretext of 'maintaining public order'.

Any human rights violations committed against people with disabilities or any other citizen should of course be investigated and those responsible brought to justice. Unfortunately, judges and public prosecutors, as we have seen from the above accounts, do not investigate torture allegations and the climate of impunity of course means that legislation alone has no deterrent effect.

In order for the situation for disabled people in the Occupied Territories to improve, it is crucial to end the blockade on international NGOs and human rights organisations and observers to enter Western Sahara. More pressure is needed

from the International Community and specifically the UN to remind Morocco of its specific responsibilities according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

The Moroccan authorities must allow Saharawi disability organisations to operate freely, including being able to officially register and receive financial and other support from abroad, irrespective of the organisation's political views. Furthermore, the Moroccan government must provide the same services and assistance to Saharawi citizens with disabilities as those of Moroccan origin, without discrimination.